

Abstract

As we enter 2017, animals only face more challenges from climate change and shrinking habitat. The endangerment of these species often puts their entire ecosystem at risk. I wanted to highlight this issue by creating a series of prints focusing on a few species threatened by the habitat loss and climate change that comes with our modern way of life.

This series consists of three individual images, each with editions of twelve prints. Each includes elements of Byzantine icons, playing on traditional religious symbolism for saints and martyrs. Depending on where each species originates, the image also includes religious symbolism from the respective region, and depicts parts of what makes them important to their own ecosystem.

For instance, my portrait of the Mexican Long Nosed Bat includes elements of Retablo, a South American folk art style, and plants such as agave, which relies heavily on pollination from the micro-bat. I’ve also included the Bluefin Tuna and the Red Panda, both ecologically important species who’s population is severely declining due to human influence.

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Process

Each of these prints is an original screenprint. Screenprinting is a printmaking process using a fine mesh screen as a stencil to create a finished design. The artist uses various methods to block parts of the screen and then uses a squeegee to push ink through the open areas of the screen onto the paper. This leaves an even, thin layer of ink on the paper wherever the screen is unblocked. Using multiple screens or consecutively blocking out areas of the same screen allows for different colors to be layered on top of each other. Each color requires another full layer of ink; called a “run”.

The process also allows for multiples of each image to be created. A series of identical images is called an edition of prints. Each unique image from this series has 10-12 identical copies, all created from the same stencil.



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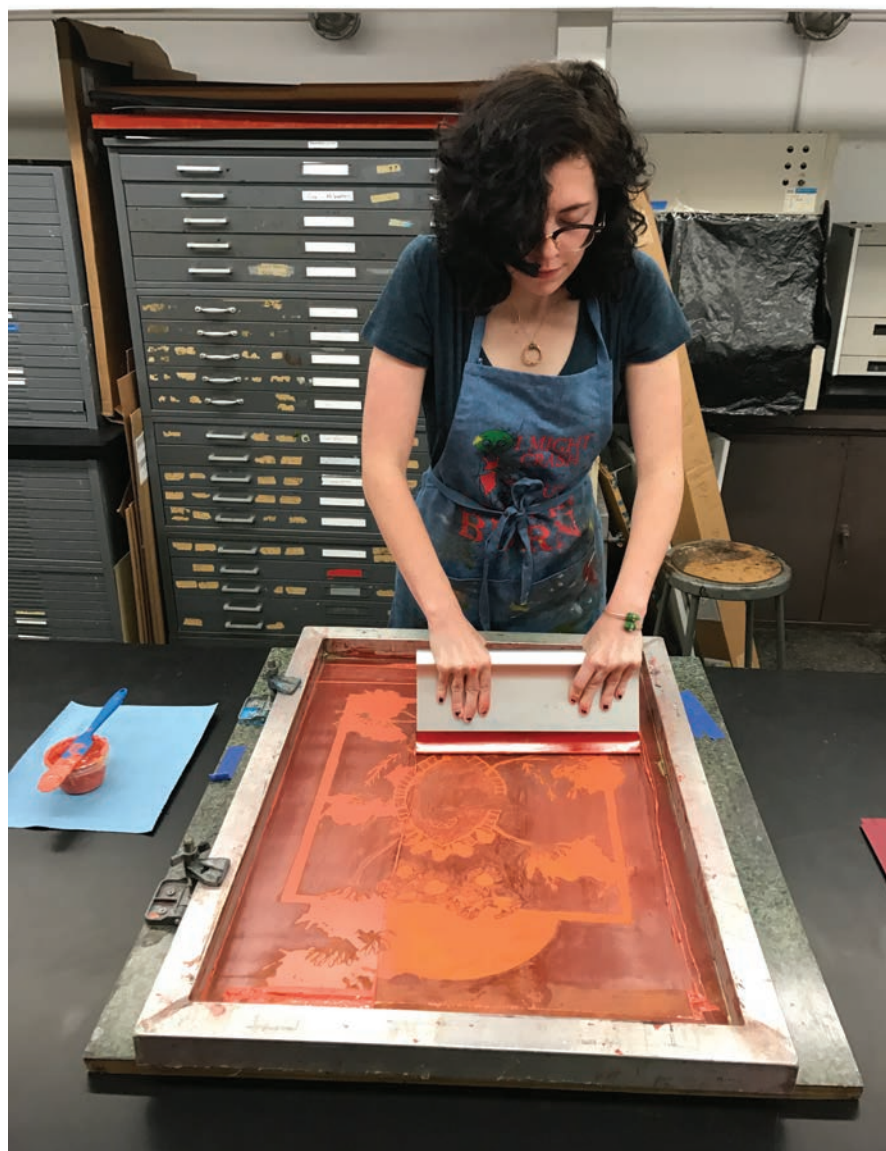


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Left: Example of in process print, starting with the first run on the far left. Each color added is another “run”.
Below: Pulling a screen--this one was for the peach color seen on the left.



Mourning - a - MENAGERIE - of - Martyrs

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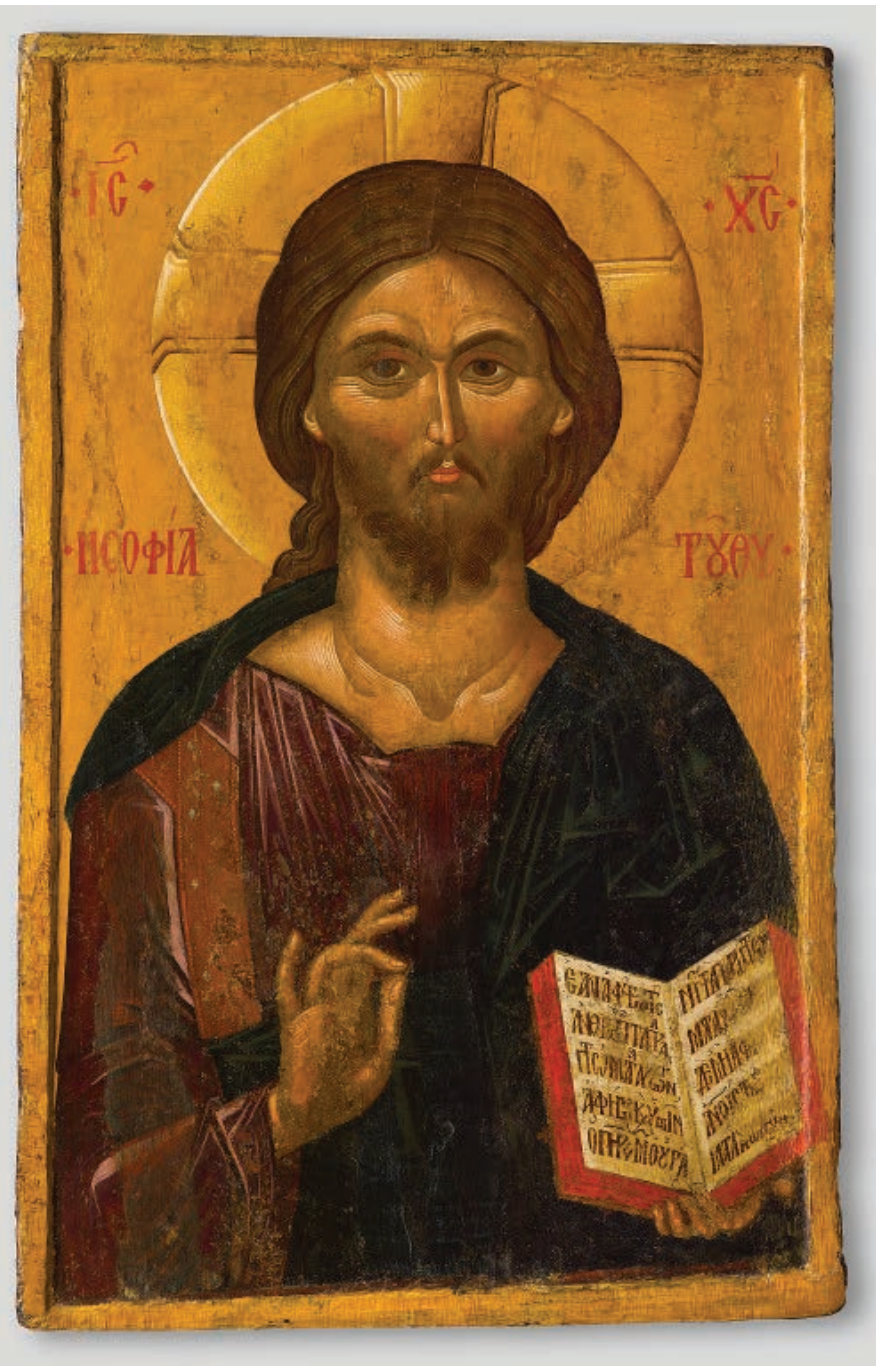
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Icons

According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website, “icons are sacred images representing the saints” and “allow direct communication with sacred figures”. I wanted to use the convention of Icons, especially Byzantine, in a lighthearted way to create martyrs out of endangered species. Byzantine icons are known for their golden halos, overly dramatic quality and floating forms. However, since many diverse species from different areas of the world were used for this project, I wanted to include religious iconography from the various areas they represent, including Retablo, Taoist and Greek mythological elements.



Example of a Byzantine icon via the National Gallery of Art website (ng.gov)

Threats

According to the National Wildlife Federation, "climate change is altering key habitat elements that are critical to wildlife's survival", while habitat loss continues to push species out of their natural territories, fragmenting populations and jeopardizing natural resources. While climate change broadly effects almost every species, additionally, many species are threatened by other aspects of modern culture.

LESSER LONG NOSED BAT

The Long Nosed Mexican bat is an important pollinator. Many plants have adapted to be pollinated solely by bats, such as the Agave plant. Agave, the source for tequila and many nectars, is an economically and culturally important product. “Bat pollination of cacti and agaves helps maintain healthy desert ecosystems”, according to the USDA Forest Service.

Lesser Long Nosed Bats are threatened by habitat loss, invasive plant species, and light pollution. Like many species of bat, they face a strange disease called White-Nose Syndrome, a lethal fungal infection spreading alarmingly fast.

BLUEFIN TUNA

Known for their sought after meat and high price, Bluefin Tuna benefit more than the culinary scene. According to the World Wildlife Federation, “Tuna are a top predator in the marine food chain, maintaining a balance in the ocean environment”. Defined as an apex predator, tuna are crucial to keeping populations of fish in check.

Bluefin and other species of tuna suffer from overfishing, largely for culinary and sushi markets. Illegal overfishing is a major problem, with 85% of fish stocks at risk of unregulated fishing according to the WWF.

RED PANDA

Red Pandas serve a critical role within their ecosystem by preserving forest areas. They are found largely in the slopes of the Himilayas, a crucial forest for species diversity as well as the air and water quality of the surrounding continent. They also serve an important role in food chains, providing ecological balance.

Red Pandas are listed as an endangered species with a falling population. They are largely threatened by deforestation and habitat loss, as well as poaching for their brilliant red fur.